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WHAT CAN NORTH AMERICA DO TO PROMOTE SPECIFICALLY RURAL ACTIVITIES ON THE FIELD?

14. FOR JAPAN

by
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The work in Japan has been quite largely city-centered. I do not know where there is a field where Christianity has approached the situation more definitely with an urban complex than it has in Japan. Of course Japan is highly industrialized and the urban situation bulks large. However, Japan is still a nation of rural people. It is being increasingly recognized that we cannot do anything about changing the fundamental basis of Japanese thinking until we reach the rural population. Kagawa for a long time was a lone voice among Japanese leaders in his emphasis on the importance of the rural field, but the movement is gaining ground rapidly.

The Japanese are the type of people who excel in organization and who think in terms of organization and system. Because of this and also because of the ideas with which missionaries went to Japan we have there a situation which has become crystallized far too early. Churches, seminaries, and the whole ecclesiastical paraphernalia of our highly organized Western Christianity are now in operation in Japan for very small and struggling denominations. Consequently it is difficult for missionaries or for mission boards to affect the situation vitally except in and through these organizations. At the same time the situation would be greatly benefited if conditions were sufficiently fluid to permit those who view them from the outside to bring some influence to bear.

The crux of the situation is the Theological Seminary and yet students in our Seminaries are studying the religions of Greece and Rome and know little or nothing of the religious background of the shrines and temples which line the streets outside the seminary walls. Consequently they go out ignorant of the thought and needs of the rural people of their own day and their own country. Someone has mentioned the fact that country-bred people sometimes survive the urban influence of the seminary and remain rural-minded. I know of such a case in Izu in Japan. There is a splendid piece of work there which has been developed by a Japanese pastor who is a village man and who did not allow urban theological training to divert him from the village. He has developed there a rural project which approaches the country village as a whole.

The Rural Institute now being organized under the auspices of the National Christian Council of Japan, as a demonstration center for the orientation of Christian workers in the country to rural problems should profoundly affect the situation in Japan in the course of a few years. The proposal for the establishment of this Institute, coming from the National Christian Council, offered

something concrete that the Boards in America could do to affect the situation in Japan and yet the difficulty of securing the necessary funds in this particular case points to an important defect in our set-up here. As Boards we ought to have more free money so that we can support such undertakings as this, which offer an opportunity of affecting the total situation in a given country. We are too tied up with our ongoing program and we have not adequately faced the problem of holding down this program to the point where it would be possible to have enough free money to launch such promising experiments.

One of the things which needs to be done and which we as mission boards can do is to re-orient or "recondition" our own missionaries. We should make definite plans for re-orienting, when on furlough, our older and more experienced missionaries working in rural areas. They might not take up definitely rural work, but an awareness of the problem would have its effect on their whole approach and on the tota l situation in a given field.